THAT THE PURPOSE OF GOD ACCORDING TO ELECTION MIGHT STAND
The Love Of God

The love of God is the highest, most exalted thought ever to enter the human mind. Of all the perfect attributes of the eternal, infinite Being, love revealed to mankind what is more wonderful than God's love? What greater privilege than to receive it? What fuller joy than to experience it?

The love of God amazed the prophets and thrilled the apostles. Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah and David all speak of God's love in glorious terms. Peter, John and Paul describe divine love in the finest language. All testify of its transcendent nature and unequalled blessedness. To know, to taste the love of God is to possess the fulness of divine grace and the promise of heavenly glory, for the love of God is the companion of all spiritual gifts.

The scriptures speak of God's love in the most emphatic terms. It is great love. It is everlasting love. Love so characteristic of the very nature of God that John declares, 'God is love'. As God is unchangeable so His love is unchangeable. Those loved by God are loved eternally and God's eternal love is the source and vehicle of all spiritual blessings bestowed upon those loved before time.

It is distinguishing love. God's love is individual and personal as all true love must be. General love or universal love is neither Biblical nor meaningful. God's elective purpose and sovereign grace is grounded in His particular love.

He declares to His chosen people, 'Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine … Since thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honourable, and I have loved thee: therefore will I give men for thee, and people for thy life' (Isaiah 43:1, 4).

Furthermore, the love of God is unconditional. God does not love based on man's goodness, faith, or obedience. His love was settled upon His people before ever they drew breath. He declares, 'I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion'. He acts towards His people in love, bestowing blessing upon blessing because He loved us.

And God's love is effectual love. God loved His people with great love and desired they be with Him in holy union. He binds us to Himself with bands of effectual love. He settled a covenant of peace, determined a plan of salvation, performed every condition necessary to secure the redemption from sin of His dearly beloved bride. It is God's effectual love we see demonstrated in the coming and dying of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul says, 'God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us' (Romans 5:8). John says, 'Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us' (1 John 3:16). And continues, 'Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins' (1 John 4:10).

In the sacrifice and death of the Lord Jesus we see the highest demonstration of God's love. It is in Christ God's love is seen, received and experienced. Outside of Christ there is no love of God, nor any grace, or blessing from God. Our Saviour's atoning sacrifice declares and enables God's love to poor fallen sinners.

Do not the people of God find this love inspiring? It is not law, duty, or obligation motivates God's people to worship but love. We are constrained by the love of Christ. We love Him because He first loved us. We love one another as Christ has loved us.

There is a lovely little phrase at the end of Jude's powerful epistle. He says, 'Keep yourselves in the love of God'. These words do not imply God's love can be lost. It cannot. But our enjoyment of God's love ebbs and flows. God's love does not change but His people are fickle and may lose sight of it by taking their eyes from their Saviour.

We keep ourselves in the love of God by looking unto Jesus, by attending to the gospel of peace, and by continuing in Christ's word by which His people receive 'the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life'.

Isaiah 45:6  That they may know from the rising of the sun, and from the west, that there is none beside me. I am the LORD, and there is none else.

Westward Bound  Courtesy: Fiona Birks
When we lose temporal possessions, even the life of loved ones and our own life, it is God who gave and it is God who taketh away. C.H. Spurgeon told this story.

A gardener was servant to a great master. The servant’s job was to take care of the roses. He cared for the roses with great diligence. But one day he discovered someone had clipped roses from one of his bushes. The servant went about asking who clipped the roses. Finally, someone said, “The master of the house did it!” The servant said, “Then it is good. He is the master. This is his house. These are his roses. I am his servant.”

Brethren, God is the Master and we are His servants. He gave us the roses and God can clip the roses when He will. Let us thank God and bless His name when He takes, the same as we bless His name when He gives. And let us do so rejoicing in this, God shall never take from us His spiritual gifts in Christ, ‘For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance’ (Romans 11:29).

Clay Curtis
I have seen people die without Christ, without faith in Him, and without hope. I have seen the terror of hell on their helpless, hopeless faces as they gasped for their last breath of life. I pray that I will never see that pitiful expression again. However, I have also seen some of God’s saints die in faith, with the smile of God upon their souls and the peace of God radiating through their words. I cannot imagine a more delightful or more glorious thing to behold on this earth. Balaam spoke well when he said, ‘Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his’ (Numbers 23:10).

Exodus 15 records Moses’ song of redemption and salvation. In verses 1-13 he sang praise to God for the redemption, grace and salvation Israel had just experienced. In verses 14-19 he praises God for the sure hope of a peaceful and glorious entrance into the land of promise. Specifically, in verses 16-18, the prophet of God speaks of the safe, peaceful passage of Israel across the Jordan river into the land of Canaan. This prophetic song was written for us. Typically, prophetically, it declares that God’s saints will pass through death into glory safely and peacefully, by the greatness of His arm. ‘Fear and dread shall fall upon them; by the greatness of thine arm they shall be as still as a stone; till thy people pass over, O LORD, till the people pass over, which thou hast purchased. Thou shalt bring them in, and plant them in the mountain of thine inheritance, in the place, O LORD, which thou hast made for thee to dwell in, in the Sanctuary, O Lord, which thy hands have established. The LORD shall reign for ever and ever’ (Exodus 15:16-18).

A Purchased People
The Lord Jesus Christ has a people in this world whom He has purchased. Moses spoke of the Lord’s people as those whom He has purchased. Who are these people? They are the people of God’s choice, His peculiar people.
These purchased people are those men and women with whom Christ’s delights were from everlasting. They are peculiarly and distinctively His (Deuteronomy 7:7-9). Chosen in electing love (John 15:16). Redeemed by His precious blood (1 Peter 1:18). Called by almighty grace (Psalm 65:4). Given faith in Christ by the operation of His Spirit (Colossians 2:12). If you are a believer, you are one of His people whom He has purchased!

Christ alone is the Purchaser of His people. He alone was able and willing to do it, as the God-man, our Mediator. He alone has the lawful right to do it, as our Kinsman Redeemer. He alone has done it. Christ did not try to redeem anyone, or merely make redemption available for everyone. He effectually redeemed all His people by His sin-atoning sacrifice at Calvary (Galatians 3:13; Hebrews 9:12). When the Word of God talks about redemption, it is talking about something that is finished (Daniel 9:24; John 19:30.) The thing is done, not provided, but done. ‘Thou hast purchased!’ ‘Ye are bought with a price!’ (1 Corinthians 6:20). The price by which the Son of God purchased His people is His own precious blood (1 Peter 1:18, 19; Revelation 5:9; Acts 20:28). How this glorious subject ought to thrill our souls! The redemption accomplished by Christ at Calvary was a special purchase. He has purchased a special people, with a special price, because of special love, to enjoy special blessings of grace and glory forever. It was a proper purchase. We sometimes use the words ‘buy’ or ‘purchase’ in other ways (Isaiah 55:1). We purchase grace and mercy, without money and without price, by faith in Christ. That is not the case here. Christ made a real, proper purchase of God’s elect by the price of His own blood. It was a legal purchase (Isaiah 43:1). The people were named. He died for and purchased “his people” (Isaiah 53:8; John 10:11, 15, 26). The price was agreed to (Romans 3:24-26). The purchase was made (Romans 5:8-11). It cannot be invalidated (Romans 11:29). It is a full and complete purchase. Here is the greatest purchase ever made. Christ has redeemed and purchased a great multitude which no man can number, who could not be redeemed by any other price than His precious blood (Psalm 49:7, 8; Job 36:18). We rejoice to know that Christ has a people in this world He has purchased.

Nothing so comforts dying saints as the knowledge of effectually accomplished redemption by the blood of Christ. Several years ago, I visited a dying friend. His last words to me, as I started to leave him were, ‘Brother, my hope is in that Man in heaven whose blood has washed away all of my sins and given me perfect righteousness before God. Thank God for Christ. I thank God for the blood of Christ! I am thankful to know there is a Man in glory who is my Substitute. My hope is him!’ Our hearts are overwhelmed with joy to know that we are among those people for whom redemption is accomplished. I say, with my brother, ‘Thank God for Christ! Thank God for the blood of Christ!’

Pass Through Death

Though redeemed by blood and saved by grace, God’s purchased people must pass through death into glory. As Israel must pass through the Jordan River to reach the land of Canaan, so God’s pilgrims in this world must pass through death to reach their home in glory. Notice two things in this regard.

1. Death for the believer is just a passage

Death is passing from this world to another world, from time into eternity. It is to depart from this world and be with Christ, which is far better (Philippians 1:23). It is a passage through a low, lonesome valley (Psalm 23:4). This life, our whole life, is the valley of the shadow of death. The Puritan, Thomas Brooks, wrote, “Death to a saint is nothing but the taking of a sweet flower out of this wilderness, and planting it in the garden of Paradise.” Moses compared death to passing over a river, crossing from this shore to that shore. For the believer that is all death is. A passage from this foreign, condemned land to our homeland in glory!

2. It is a necessary passage

Death must be. This is the way of all the earth. There is no avoiding it. The grave is the house appointed for all living. Your grave may be a stately mausoleum or a pit in the earth; but to the grave you must go, and so must I, at the time appointed of God (Hebrews 9:27; Job 30:23; Genesis 47:29). Just as ‘the time drew nigh that Israel must die’, so the time draws near when each of us must die. As there was no other way for Israel to get to Canaan, but by going through Jordan, so there is no other way for us to go to heaven but by the grave. Even Enoch and Elijah, though they escaped death, did not escape the change that all must undergo before we can enter glory. Even those saints living at Christ’s Second Advent must be changed. Someone said, “Were it not for sin, death had
never had a beginning, and were it not for death, sin would never have had an ending.” We must die. Yet, in reality, the believer never dies (John 11:25). Christ has taken the sting out of death for us. He has delivered us from death’s penal aspect. He has delivered us from the second death. Soon, He will deliver every believer from sin and all the consequences of sin. We ought never to look upon that deliverance as death. At death, we begin to live!

We may not presently think so, but for the dying believer, death is a friend, a welcome, long-expected friend, who brings with him great relief and comfort. It is necessary because of sin. It is welcome because of grace. This body of flesh is our greatest enemy. Death will be a welcome relief.

Safe And Peaceful

The believer’s passage through death into glory is always safe and usually peaceful. My primary reason for writing these studies is to assure the children of God there is nothing in death that should cause them fear, either for themselves or for their departed friends and loved ones who sleep in their Saviour’s arms. When Joshua and the children of Israel came to the river Jordan and passed over it, not one was lost, missing, or hurt by it. So it shall be with God’s elect. Every one of the Lord’s purchased people shall pass through the Jordan and come safe at last into the heavenly Canaan. You who were ordained to eternal life shall possess it. You who have been purchased by Christ’s blood shall see the Lamb for sinners slain. You who are united to Christ shall be with Christ in glory. You who have the earnest of the Spirit shall have the full inheritance of glory. You who have faith in Christ shall be found with Christ. You who are under Christ’s care and in His hands shall be presented by Christ to your heavenly Father (Hebrews 2:13). You to whom God has given grace, He will give glory also. As Israel lost nothing by passing from the wilderness through Jordan into Canaan, so God’s saints lose nothing by passing through death into glory. They go immediately into heaven (2 Corinthians 5:1-4, 8). As we have seen, all their most earnest and constant prayers are answered in an instant. They shall be first in the resurrection (1 Thessalonians 4:16).

Moreover, generally speaking, God’s saints pass through death into glory peaceably, with quiet, comfortable confidence. I do not say that every believer will be absolutely free of fear and trouble in the hour of death; but generally they are. I do not suggest we are freed from the fear of death as we think about it. Yet, I do say, generally, when a believer is faced with death, he is filled with peace. God does not give dying grace until it is needed. However, when it is needed, he does not fail to give it. In that hour your enemies shall be ‘as still as a stone’.

When Israel went out of Egypt, not a dog was allowed to move its tongue against them. No enemy molested them. No foe gave them any disturbance. They left Egypt with a high hand, triumphantly! When they passed over Jordan into the land of Canaan, though they had many enemies, not one was to be seen or heard. They were, as Moses said, ‘As still as a stone;’ until God’s people had passed over. So it is with God’s saints in the hour of death. As a general rule, those spiritual enemies, who have given you so much uneasiness in life, will not be allowed to distress you in your last moments on this earth.

Your inward sins and corruptions of nature will not be able to rob you of peace when certain deliverance is at hand. John Gill said, “The believer perceiving his dissolution drawing nigh, spies deliverance from it through Jesus Christ our Lord (Romans 7:23-25).” This confidence and peace arises from “a comfortable view of the free and full forgiveness of his sins through the blood of Christ; and of his justification before God, and acceptance with him through his pure and perfect righteousness.” Thomas Watson wrote, “He may look upon death with joy who can look on forgiveness with faith!” When the Puritan Thomas Goodwin was on his death bed, in his dying hour, he referred to his inward sins as “croaking toads,” and said, “Thank God, in a short time I will hear no more their croaking language!”

An evil heart of unbelief shall not likely distress the soul that is about to leave the realm of unbelief forever. Nothing makes God’s children more uneasy in life than an evil heart of unbelief; but in the hour of death, God graciously drives this monster from the hearts of His children, even as he did with David (2 Samuel 23:5) and Paul (2 Timothy 1:12; 4:6-8). It is written of God’s saints, ‘These all died in faith’ (Hebrews 11:13), because ‘the righteous hath hope in his death’ (Proverbs 14:32). When he knew he was dying, God’s faithful servant, John Gill, said to a friend standing by, ‘I have nothing to make me uneasy.’

Your adversary the devil will find it hard to overwhelm you when you are about to tread him beneath your feet (Romans 16:20). Satan
is a very busy adversary. His temptations are many and great. In the hour of death, I am sure, he will come against us with all his force like a flood; but our Comforter, the Spirit of God, will lift up a banner against him and put him to flight (Isaiah 59:19). The banner he shall lift to defend us is the gospel of Christ, His Person, His blood, His intercession, and His righteousness. I do not doubt that believing saints, as they leave this world and soar through the heavens into glory crying, O Death, where is thy sting?, do so with the same bold challenges raised by the Apostle in Romans eight: ‘If God be for us, who can be against us?’ ‘Who shall lay anything to the charge of God’s elect?’ ‘Who is he that condemneth?’ ‘Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?’ (Romans 8:32-39). ‘Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright: for the end of that man is peace’ (Psalm 37:37; cf. 1 Corinthians 15:55-57).

God’s Mighty Arm
This safe and peaceful passage of God’s saints through death into glory must be ascribed to the greatness of His arm. Again,

Fear and dread shall fall upon them; by the greatness of thine arm they shall be as still as a stone; till thy people pass over, O LORD, till the people pass over, which thou hast purchased. Thou shalt bring them in and plant them in the mountain of thine inheritance, in the place, O LORD, which thou hast made for thee to dwell in, in the Sanctuary, O Lord, which thy hands have established. The LORD shall reign for ever and ever.

Read Joshua the third chapter. There we find many things by which God made Israel’s passage through Jordan into Canaan comfortable and peaceful. These very things shall make our passage out of this world into heaven comfortable and peaceful. 1. The presence of the Lord sustained them (Joshua 3:10; Psalm 23:4). 2. The ark of the Lord, the symbol of accomplished redemption, of satisfied justice, of blood atonement, went before them (v. 11). 3. The priests of God led the way, even as Christ has gone into heaven, leading the way before us (Joshua 3:11; Hebrews 6:20). As the priests stood firm upon dry ground (Joshua 3:17), so God’s faithful servants, standing firm upon the gospel, inspire God’s saints with confident hope of eternal life in and by Christ (Hebrews 13:7, 8). 4. The sight of the waters divided before them (Joshua 3:13) was a picture of salvation accomplished by the hand of God. With that confidence of faith, we may well die in peace. Our passage through death into heaven shall be both safe and easy, being assured that Christ will have His purchased people.

And an highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called The way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it; but it shall be for those: the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein. No lion shall be there, nor any ravenous beast shall go up thereon, it shall not be found there; but the redeemed shall walk there: And the ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away (Isaiah 35:8-10).

Going Home
By Don Fortner
Price £23.95 ($30.00)
206 pages hardback

These seventeen chapters are all about heaven and this is the best book I have ever read on the subject. As I read the fifth chapter, “Heaven: The Place of Satisfaction” my heart was blessed indeed.

It is certainly a superb exposition on the subject of heaven, and how God saves sinners in preparation for it. But you will find the book deals, too, with all aspects of a believer’s attitude towards death, the confident assurance of joy to come, and many helpful scriptural comforts for the experience of dying.

I believe this book will prove to be very instructive for ministers of the gospel, and those involved pastorally with the Lord’s people. It will be most helpful, too, to God’s saints who live with eager expectation in hope of eternal life with God our Saviour in our heavenly home. Oh, the glory that awaits all of God’s blood-bought children!

Extract from Foreword by Pastor Earnie W. Lucas

Available from Go Publications at: http://go-newfocus.co.uk/books
Purchases through Paypal or credit card.
The Lord hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee.

Jeremiah 31:3

Love Divine, All Loves Excelling

The Lord hath appeared of old unto me, saying, ... Either to the prophet, bidding him say to the church what follows: or to Christ, who was from eternity with the Father; lay in his bosom; between whom the council of peace was; with whom the covenant was made; and whom God loved before the foundation of the world; and which is observed by Him, for the comfort of His people, John 17:24; but rather they are the words of Israel, or the church, owning the above instances of God's grace and goodness; and that He had greatly appeared to them, and for them, in former times; but then this was a great while ago; and besides, now He hid His face from them, and they were under the tokens of His displeasure, and not of His love; to which the Lord replies, for the word “saying” is not in the text, which makes the following a continuation of the church's speech, though wrongly; since they are the words of the Lord, taking up the church for speaking too slightly and improperly of His love, and in a complaining way:

yea I have loved thee with an everlasting love; not only of old, or a good while ago, but from all eternity, and with a love which will always last, and does, notwithstanding dark and afflicting providences; for this love is like Himself, sovereign, unchangeable, and everlasting: 'I have loved thee': I, who am the great God, the Creator of the ends of the earth, the King of kings, and Lord of lords; a God of infinite purity and holiness; do whatever I please in heaven and in earth; and am the Lord that changes not: 'have loved'; not love only now, and shall hereafter; but have loved, not for some time past only, but from all eternity, with the same love I now do: 'thee' personally, 'Jacob, have I loved', Romans 9:13; thee nakedly, and not thine, or for anything done by thee; thee separately and distinctly, and not others; thee a creature, vile and sinful, a transgressor from the womb, and known to be so beforehand; 'thee' now openly, and in an applicatory way, through the evidence of the spirit: 'with an everlasting love': a love from everlasting, which does not commence in time with faith, repentance, and new obedience; these being the fruits and effects of it; but was from all eternity, as appears from the eternal choice of the persons loved in Christ; from the everlasting covenant made with them in Him; from the constitution and setting up of Christ as their Mediator from everlasting; and from the security of their persons and grace in Him, before the world began: and this love will endure to everlasting, without any variation or change; nothing can separate from it. The evidence of it follows:

therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee; out of a state of nature; out of Satan's hands; out of the pit wherein is no water, the horrible pit, the mire and clay; unto Christ, His person, blood, righteousness, and fulness, by faith to lay hold upon them; unto His church, and to a participation of the ordinances and privileges of it; to nearer communion with God, and at last will draw to eternal glory. This is the Father's act, and to Him it is usually ascribed: it chiefly regards the work of conversion, and the influence of divine grace on that; though it also includes after acts of drawing: it supposes weakness in men; is the effect of powerful and efficacious grace; and is done without offering any violence or force to the will of man, who is drawn with, and not against, his will. This is an instance of the love of God; a fruit and effect of it: it is love that draws a soul to Christ, and is the cause of its coming to Him; it is love that reveals him to it, and causes it to come to him; love is then manifested and shed abroad in the heart; a cord of it is let down into it, and with it the Lord draws; it is not by the threats of the law, but by the declarations of grace in the Gospel; the cause of drawing is love, and the manner of it is with it.

Extract from John Gill’s Commentary on the Whole Bible
As I had the happiness of being born of believing parents, I imbibed the sound doctrines of the Gospel from my infancy; nor was I without touches of heart, checks of conscience, and meltings of affections, by the secret strivings of God’s Spirit within me while very young; but the impressions were not deep, nor the influences lasting, being frequently defaced and quenched by the vanities and vices of childhood and youth.

About the twenty-first year of my age I began to be under great anxiety concerning my soul. The spirit of bondage distressed me sore; though I endeavoured (as I believe most under legal convictions do) to commend myself to God’s favour by amendment of life, virtuous resolutions, moral rectitude, and a strict attendance on religious ordinances. I strove to subdue my flesh by fasting, and other rigorous acts of penance and mortification; and whenever I was captivated by its lusts (which indeed was often the case) I endeavoured to reconcile myself again to God by sorrow for my faults, which, if attended with tears, I hoped would pass as current coin with heaven; and then I judged myself whole again, and to stand on equal terms with my foes, till the next fall, which generally succeeded in a short time.

In this uneasy, restless round of sinning and repenting, working and dreading, I went on for above seven years; when, a great domestic affliction befalling me (in which I was a moderate sufferer, but a monstrous sinner), I began to sink deeper and deeper into conviction of my nature’s evil, the deceitfulness and hardness of my heart, the wickedness of my life, the shallowness of my Christianity, and the blindness of my devotion. I saw that I was in a dangerous state, and that I must have a better religion than I had yet experienced before I could with any propriety call myself a Christian. How did I now long to feel the merits of Christ applied to my soul by the Holy Spirit! How often did I make my strongest efforts to call God, my God! But, alas, I could no more do this than I could raise the dead! I found now, by woeful experience, that faith was not in my power; and the question with me now was, not whether I would be a Christian or no; but whether I might: not whether I should repent and believe; but whether God would give me true repentance and a living faith.

After some weeks passed in this gloomy, dreadful state, the Lord was pleased to comfort me a little, by enabling me to appropriate, in some measure, the merits of the Saviour to my own soul. This comfort increased for some time; and my understanding was also wonderfully illuminated in reading the Holy Scriptures, so that I could see Christ in many passages where before I little imagined to find Him, and was encouraged to hope I had an interest in His merits and the benefits by Him procured to His people.

In this blessed state my continuance was but short; for rushing impetuously into notions beyond my experience, I hasted to make myself a Christian by mere doctrine, adopting other men’s opinions before I had tried them; and set up for a great light in religion, disregarding the internal work of grace begun in my soul by the Holy Ghost. This liberty, assumed by myself, and not given by Christ, soon grew to libertinism;
Lamb of God, we fall before Thee,
Humbly trusting in Thy cross.
That alone be all our glory;
All things else are only dross.

Thee we own a perfect Saviour,
Only source of all that's good.
Every grace and every favour
Comes to us through Jesus' blood.

Jesus gives us true repentance
By His Spirit sent from Heav'n;
Whispers this transporting sentence,
"Son, thy sins are all forgiv'n."

Faith He grants us to believe it,
Grateful hearts His love to prize;
Want we wisdom? He must give it,
Hearing ears and seeing eyes.

Jesus gives us pure affections,
Wills to do what He requires,
Makes us follow His directions,
And what He commands, inspires.

All our prayers and all our praises,
Rightly offered in His Name—
He that dictates them is Jesus;
He that answers is the same.

Joseph Hart (1712-1768)
For several years I went on in this easy, cool, smooth, and indolent manner, with a lukewarm, insipid kind of religion, yet not without some secret whispers of God’s love, and visitations of His grace, and now and then warm addresses to Him in private prayer. But, alas, all this while my heart was whole; the fountains of the great deeps of my sinful nature were not broken up! I was therefore conscious that the written word of God was against me, especially those parts of it that represent the children of God as a poor, afflicted, mourning, broken-hearted people; of which characteristics I was destitute; nor was the blood of Christ effectually applied to my soul. I looked on His death indeed as the grand sacrifice for sin; and always thought on Him with respect and reverence; but did not see the inestimable value of His blood and righteousness clearly enough to make me abhor myself, and count all things else but dung and dross. On the contrary, when I used to read the Scriptures (which I now did constantly, both in English and the original languages), though my mind was often affected, and my understanding illuminated, by many passages that treated of the Saviour, yet I was so far from seeing or owning that there was such a necessity for His death, and that it could be of such infinite value as is represented, that I have often resolved (oh, the horrible depths of man’s fall, and the desperate wickedness of the human heart!), that I never would believe it; and have been tempted to tell God Himself that He could not make me, without injuring my reason, and imposing on my understanding by downright violence and pernicious power.

About three or four years ago I fell into a deep despondency of mind, because I had never experienced grand revelations and miraculous discoveries. I was very melancholy, and shunned all company, walking pensively alone, or sitting in private, and bewailing my sad and dark condition, not having a friend in the world to whom I could communicate the burden of my soul; which was so heavy, that I sometimes hesitated even to take my necessary food. But after many a gloomy doleful hour spent in solitude and sorrow, not without strong and frequent cries and tears to God, and beseeching Him to reveal Himself to me, praying at the same time He asked me, in the midst of my prayers, whether I rather chose the visionary revelations of which I had formed some wild idea, or to be content with trusting to the low, despised mystery of a crucified man? I was enabled to prefer the latter; and felt great comfort in expecting the future effects of my choice.

But gloom of mind and dejection of spirit still frequently overwhelmed me; from which I used to be relieved by pouring out my soul to Christ, and beseeching Him, with cries and groans and tears, to reveal Himself to me; praying at the same time it might be done without pain; for I was so much a coward, that I preferred ease to every other consideration. I was often answered by such portion of Scripture as these: ‘Behold, I come quickly; and My reward is with me.’ That which thou hast already hold fast till I come.’ To the latter of these I closed my hands fast, and cried, I would sooner part with every drop of blood than let go the hopes I already had in a crucified Saviour; and to the former I used to reply (after considering the words, ‘My reward is with Me’), ‘Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly.’ For, though I expected sore visitation, yet believing that Christ would bring strength and power with Him, I waited, and longed for His coming.

The week before Easter, 1757, I had such an amazing view of the agony of Christ in the garden, as I know not well how to describe. I was lost in wonder and adoration; and the impression it made was too deep, I believe, ever to be obliterated. I shall say no more of this; but only remark that, notwithstanding all that is talked about the sufferings of Jesus, none can know anything of them but by the Holy Ghost; and I believe he that knows most, knows but very little. It was upon this I made the first part of Hymn 1, On the Passion; which, however, I afterwards mutilated and altered.

I used to be often terribly cut down with those words, ‘And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth’ (Matthew 25:30); which sometimes sunk me almost to utter despair; and then again I used to receive some comfort. At length despair began to make dreadful head against me; hopes grew fainter, and terrors stronger; which latter were increased by a faithful letter I received from a friend, who had also run great lengths of impiety with me formerly, but was now reclaimed. The convictions I now laboured under were not like those legal convictions I had formerly felt, but far worse, horrible beyond expression. I looked on myself as a gospel sinner; one that had trampled under the foot the blood of Jesus, and for whom there remained no more sacrifice for sin. I shall not enlarge here, choosing rather to suppress than exaggerate; as I do not lay stress...
on my own sufferings, or those of any other man, except the Man Christ Jesus; but surely what I felt was very grievous, for so deep was my despair, that I found in me a kind of wish that I might only be damned with the common damnation of transgressors of God’s law. But, oh! I thought the hottest place in hell must be my portion. All the evangelical promises were so far from comforting me, that they were my greatest tormentors, because they would only increase my condemnation.

This distress and anguish of soul was likewise attended with great infirmity of body. One morning I was waked with intolerable pain, as if balls of fire were burning my reins. Amidst this excruciating torture, which lasted near an hour, one of the first things I thought on was the pierced body of Jesus, and what pain of body, as well as soul, He underwent. Soon after this very stroke, I was seized in the evening with a cold shivering, which I concluded to be the icy damp of death, and that after that must come everlasting damnation. In this condition I went to my bed, but dared not close my eyes, lest I should awake in hell.

While these horrors remained, I used to run backwards and forwards to places of religious worship, especially to the Tabernacle in Moorfields, the Chapel in Tottenham Court Road, where indeed I received some comfort, which, though little, was then highly prized, because greatly needed; but in the general almost every thing served only to condemn me, to make me rue my own backslidings, and envy those children of God who had continued to walk honestly ever since their first conversion. Notions of religion I wanted no man to teach me: I had doctrine enough, but found by woeful experience, that dry doctrine, though ever so sound, will not sustain a soul in the day of trial.

In this sad state I went moping about (and that I could, was next to a miracle), having some little hope at the bottom under all, which now and then would glimmer, but was soon overwhelmed again with clouds of horror, till Whit-Sunday, 1757, when I happened to go in the afternoon to the Moravian Chapel in Fetter Lane, where I had been several times before. The minister preached on these words, ‘Because thou hast kept the words of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth’ (Rev. iii. 10). Though the text, and most of what was said on it, seemed to make greatly against me, yet I listened with much attention, and felt myself deeply impressed by it. When it was over, I thought of hastening to Tottenham Court Chapel; but presently altering my mind, returned to my own house.

I was hardly got home when I felt myself melting away into a strange softness of affection, which made me fling myself on my knees before God. My horrors were immediately dispelled, and such light and comfort flowed into my heart as no words can paint. The Lord by His Spirit of love came, not in a visionary manner into my brain, but with such divine power and energy into my soul, that I was lost in blissful amazement. I cried out, ‘What me, Lord?’ His Spirit answered in me, ‘Yes, thee.’ I objected, ‘But I have been so unspeakably vile and wicked.’ The answer was, ‘I pardon thee fully and freely. Thy own goodness (for I had now set about a thorough amendment, if peradventure I might be spared) cannot save thee, nor shall thy wickedness damn thee. I undertake to work all thy works in thee and for thee; and to bring thee safe through all.’ The alteration I then felt in my soul was as sudden and palpable as that when nature was overcharged, lest I should awake in hell.
which is experienced by a person staggering, and almost sinking, under a burden, when it is immediately taken from his shoulders. Tears ran in streams from my eyes for a considerable while; and I was so swallowed up in joy and thankfulness, that I hardly knew where I was. I threw my soul willingly into my Saviour’s hands; lay weeping at His feet, wholly resigned to His will, and only begging that I might, if He was graciously pleased to permit it, be of some service to His Church and people.

Thenceforth I enjoyed sweet peace in my soul; and had such clear and frequent manifestations of His love to me, that I longed for no other heaven. My horrors were banished, and have not, I think, returned since with equal violence. And though I can see little signs as yet of His granting my request concerning usefulness; [This was written before the Author’s call to the ministry.] though I am very barren of good, and full of evil; though I have many sore trials and temptation in my soul; yet it pleases the Lord to reveal Himself often in me, to open the mysteries of His cross, and give me to trust in His precious blood.

Not long after this my – shall I call it reconversion? – I was terribly infested with thoughts so monstrously obscene and blasphemous, that they cannot be spoken, nor so much as hinted; and I believe such as hardly ever entered into the heart of any other man; though I am sensible that most of God’s children are sometimes attacked in like manner; but mine were foul and black beyond example, and seemed to be the masterpieces of hell. They haunted me some months; and used to make me weep bitterly, and cry earnestly to my God to remove them; which at last He was pleased to do in a great measure; though they would often be return still, like intruding visitants, but are not permitted to come with much power. In short, I feel myself now as poor, as weak, as helpless and dependent as ever; but now my weakness is my greatest strength; I now rejoice, though I rejoice with trembling.

I soon began to be visited by God’s Spirit in a different manner from what I had ever felt before. I had constant communion with Him in prayer. His sufferings, His wounds, His agonies of soul were impressed upon me in an amazing manner. I now believed my name was sculptured deep in the Lord Jesus’ breast with character never to be erased. I saw Him with the eye of faith, stooping under the load of my sins: groaning and grovelling in Gethsemane for me. The incarnate God was more and more revealed to me; and I had far other notions of His sufferings than I had entertained before. Now I saw that the grief of Christ was the grief of my Maker; that His wounds were the wounds of the Almighty God; and the least drop of His blood now appeared to me more valuable than ten thousands of worlds. As I had before thought His sufferings too little, they now appeared to me to be too great; and I often cried out in transports of blissful astonishment, ‘Lord, ’tis too much, ’tis too much; surely my soul was not worth so great a price.’ I had also such a spirit of sympathetic love to the Lord Jesus given me, that after I had left off to sorrow for myself, for some months I grieved and mourned bitterly for Him. I looked on Him whom I had pierced, and felt such sharp compunction, mixed at the same time with so much compassion, that the pain and the pleasure I experienced, are much better felt than expressed.

Jesus Christ, and Him crucified, is now the only thing I desire to know. In that incarnate mystery are contained all the rich treasures of divine wisdom. This is the mark towards which I am still pressing forward. This is the cup of salvation, of which I wish to drink deeper and deeper. This is the knowledge in which I long to grow; and desire at the same time a daily increase in all true grace and godliness. All duties, means, ordinances, etc. are to me then only rich, when they are enriched with the blood of the Lamb, in comparison of which all things else are but chaff and husks.

Pharisaic zeal, and Antinomian security, are the two engines of Satan, with which he grinds the Church in all ages, as betwixt the upper and the nether millstone. The space between them is much narrower and harder to find than most men imagine. It is a path which the vulture’s eye hath not seen; and none can show it us but the Holy Ghost. Here let no one trust the directions of his own heart, or of any other man; lest by being warned to shun the one, he be dashed against the other. The distinction is too fine for man to discern, therefore let the Christian ask direction of his God. These two hideous monsters continually worry and perplex my soul; nor is the former, though appearing in a holier shape, one whit less, but (if possible) more odious to me than the latter. Therefore, from the wonderful dealings of God towards me, I endeavour to draw the following observations.

On the one hand I would observe, that it is ‘not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God which sheweth mercy.'
That none can make a Christian but He that made the world. That is the glory of God to bring good out of evil.

That whom He loveth, He loveth unto the end.

That though all men seek, more or less, to recommend themselves to God’s favour by their works, yet ‘to him that worketh not, but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.’

That the blood of the Redeemer, applied to the soul by His Spirit, is the one thing needful.

That prayer is the task and labour of a Pharisee, but the privilege and delight of a Christian.

That God grants not the requests of His people because they pray; but they pray because He designs to answer their petitions.

That self-righteousness and legal holiness rather kept the soul from, than draw it to, Christ.

That they, who seek salvation by them, pursue shadows, mistake the great end of the law, and err from the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

That God’s design is to glorify His Son alone, and to debase the excellency of every creature.

That no righteousness besides the righteousness of Jesus (that is, the righteousness of God) is of any avail towards acceptance.

That to be a moral man, a zealous man, a devout man, is very short of being a Christian.

That the eye of faith looks more to the blood of Jesus than to the soul’s victory over corruptions.

That the dealings of God with His people, though similar in the general, are nevertheless so various, that there is no chalking out the paths of one child of God to those of another; no laying down regular plans of Christian conversion, Christian experience, Christian usefulness, or Christian conversation.

That the will of God is the only standard of right and good.

That the sprinkling of the blood of a crucified Saviour on the conscience by the Holy Ghost sanctifies a man, without which, the most abstemious life and rigorous discipline is unholy.

Lastly, that faith and holiness, with every other blessing, are the purchase of the Redeemer’s blood, and that He has a right to bestow them on whom He will, in such a manner and in such a measure as He thinks best; though the spirit in all men lusteth to envy.

On the other hand, I would observe,

That it is not so easy to be a Christian as some men seem to think. That for a living soul really to trust in Christ alone, when he sees nothing in himself but evil and sin, is an act as supernatural as for Peter to walk the sea.

That mere doctrine, though ever so sound, will not alter the heart; consequently that to turn from one set of tenets to another, is not Christian conversion.

That as much as Lazarus coming out of his grave, and feeling himself restored to life, differed from those who only saw the miracle, or believed the fact when told them, so great is the difference between a soul’s real coming out of himself, and having the righteousness of Christ imputed to him by the precious faith of God’s elect, and a man’s bare believing the doctrine of imputed righteousness because he sees it contained in Scripture, or assenting to the truth of it when proposed to his understanding by others. That a whole-hearted disciple can have but little communion with a broken-hearted Lord.

That ‘if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His.’ That a prayerless spirit is not the Spirit of Christ, but that prayer to a Christian...
is as necessary and as natural as food to a natural man.

That the usual way of going to heaven is through much tribulation. That the sinner who is drawn to Christ is not he that has learnt that he is a sinner by head knowledge, but that feels himself such by heart contrition.

That he that believeth, hath an unction from the Holy One.

That a true Christian is as vitally united to Christ as my hand or foot to my body; consequently suffers and rejoices with Him.

That a believer talks and converses with God.

That a dead faith can no more cherish the soul than a dead corpse can perform the functions of life.

That where there is true faith there will be obedience and the fear of God.

That he that lives by the faith of the Son of God, eateth His flesh and drinketh His blood.

That 'he that hath the Son hath life, and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.'

That many imagine themselves great believers, who have little or no true faith at all; and many who deem themselves void of faith, cleave to Christ by the faith of the operation of God.

That faith, like gold, must be tried in the fire before it can be safely depended on. Lastly, that Christians are sealed by the Holy Ghost to the day of redemption; and to this seal they trust their eternal welfare, not to naked knowledge, or speculative notions, though ever so deep.

They dread to dream they are rich, when they are blind and poor; to have a name to live, and yet be dead; or to be forced to fly for precarious refuge to the conjectural scheme of universal salvation, with those who hope to be saved because they think there will be none lost.

For my own part, I confess myself a sinner still, and though I am not much tempted to outward gross acts of iniquity, yet inward corruptions and spiritual wickedness continually harass and perplex my soul, and often make me cry out, 'O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?' From me they are not yet removed; though I once hoped, with many others, that I should soon get rid of them. All I can do is to look to Jesus through them all; clinging fast to His wounded side; long to be clothed with His righteousness; pray Him to plead my cause against these spiritual enemies that rise up against me; and though I feel myself leprous from head to foot, believe that I am clean through the word which He hath spoken unto me. In short, I rejoice, not because the spirits are always subject to me (for, alas! I find they are often too strong for me to control), but because my name is written in heaven.

I am daily more and more convinced that the promises of God to His people are absolute; and desire to build my hopes on the free electing love of God in Christ Jesus to my soul before the world began, which I can experimentally and feelingly say, He hath delivered me from the lowest hell. He hath plucked me as a brand out of the fire. Though my ways were dreadfully dangerous to the last degree, His eye was all along upon me for good. He hath excited me to love much, by forgiving me much. He hath shewed me, and still daily shews me, the abominable deceit, lust, enmity and pride of my heart, and the inconceivable depths of His mercy; how far I was fallen, and how much it cost Him of sweat and blood to bring me up. He hath proved Himself stronger than I, and His goodness superior to all my unworthiness. He gives me to know and to feel too, that without Him I can do nothing. He tells me (and He enables me to believe it) that I am all fair, and there is no spot in me. Though an enemy, He calls me His friend; though a traitor, His child; though a beggared prodigal, He clothes me with the best robe, and has put a ring of endless love and mercy on my hand. And though I am often sorely distressed by spiritual internal foes, afflicted, tormented, and bowed down almost to death, with the sense of my own present barrenness, ingratitude, and proneness to evil, He secretly shews me His bleeding wounds; and softly, but powerfully, whispers to my soul, 'I am thy great salvation.'

His free, distinguishing grace is the bottom on which is fixed the rest of my poor, weary, tempted soul. On this I ground my hope, oftentimes when unsupported by any other evidence, only by the Spirit of adoption received from Him. He hath chosen me out from everlasting, in whom to make known the inexhaustible riches of His free grace and long-suffering. Though I am a stranger to others, and a wonder to myself, yet I know Him, or rather, am known of Him. Though poor in myself, I am rich enough in Him. When my dry, empty, barren soul is parched with thirst, He kindly bids me come to Him, and drink my fill at the fountain head. In a word, He empowers me to say, with experimental evidence, 'Where sin abounded, grace doth much more abound.'

Amen and amen.
Man’s salvation is of pure grace or favour, without any degree of merit on the part of man, or any regard to his conformity to law, yet this grace operates in such a manner that the pardoned sinner may exclaim before the universe, who shall lay anything to my charge? At the same moment he looks up to God as a guilty sinner, and yet looks to the tribunal of God as a completely righteous person. Though polluted in himself, yet in Christ he is whiter than snow. He prays for pardon at the same moment that he considers himself owing nothing to justice. This is a thing that the wisdom of the world cannot conceive. It looks to mercy, and wishes it to save at the expense of justice. When it looks to justice, it contemplates not the righteousness of the believer through faith, but the excellency of personal character. It dare not hope that mercy would do all, nor that justice can be completely satisfied. It hopes that mercy will dispense with what justice has not received. Divine wisdom unites mercy and justice in the salvation of the believer.

Jesus had not to live a life of obedience to the law in order to merit heaven for His people, for the Father gives this freely to all those whose sins are remitted by the death of His Son.

This is a thing that the wisdom of the world cannot conceive. It looks to mercy, and wishes it to save at the expense of justice. When it looks to justice, it contemplates not the righteousness of the believer through faith, but the excellency of personal character. It dare not hope that mercy would do all, nor that justice can be completely satisfied. It hopes that mercy will dispense with what justice has not received. Divine wisdom unites mercy and justice in the salvation of the believer.

The holy life of Jesus was absolutely necessary, that He might be a Lamb without spot in His sacrifice for our sins. But it is through His sacrifice alone believers are justified, and being thus justified, eternal life is freely bestowed on them as heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ.

Some hold such an idea of the righteousness that entitles the believer to heaven, as is injurious to the character of God. It attends indeed to the demands of justice, but lessens the glory of the riches of divine grace. The death of Christ is supposed to do away the guilt of the believer’s sins, and His life of active obedience to the law is supposed to be for the purpose of meriting heaven. Now, if this makes God merciful in giving His Son for these purposes, it reflects on His grace, by representing Him as giving happiness by purchase. Why does He require any purchase for heaven? If the sins of His people are removed by the atonement of Christ, what is there to prevent Him from giving heaven to them freely? And heaven He does give to them freely. Eternal life is the gift of God through Jesus Christ. Jesus had not to live a life of obedience to the law in order to merit heaven for His people, for the Father gives this freely to all those whose sins are remitted by the death of His Son. Had the obedience of Christ’s life been the purchased of the glory of His children, God would have required a price for that which He might have given freely. For, what is to prevent Him from freely glorifying those who are cleansed of their sins? If, then He requires a purchase for that which might be given freely, the glory of His grace is tarnished. The holy life of Jesus was absolutely necessary, that He might be a Lamb without spot in His sacrifice for our sins. But it is through His sacrifice alone believers are justified, and being thus justified, eternal life is freely bestowed on them as heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ. It is by faith in the atonement of Christ that believers receive their inheritance as well as their pardon (Acts 26:18). There is certainly a distinction between justification and glorification, and it cannot be said to be impossible for men to have been cleansed of their sins, without being made heirs of such an exceeding weight of glory as is promised to the followers of Christ. All that a completely righteous man can ask is the happiness of Adam in his state of innocence. But with what is possible we have no concern; we know who has said, whom He justifieth them He also glorified. He hath saved His people from their sins, that He might show forth the exceeding riches of His grace, in His kindness towards them in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 2:7). Though pardon does not necessarily imply glory, this is no reason why glory must be purchased. The pardoned are glorified to show forth the riches of divine grace.
Writing on the 18th century British attitude to education, Edward C. Mack points out that William Cowper, the poet, was almost a lone voice in campaigning for reform in the nation’s schools. This may come as a surprise to most English-speaking teachers who are probably familiar with Cowper’s humorous John Gilpin story and his tragic poem *The Castaway* but have not yet discovered his writings on education. Perhaps Cowper’s most neglected poem is *Tirocinium or a Review of Schools*, a lengthy treatise dealing with educational reform. Nowadays Christian parents are gradually waking up to the fact that the state system of education is not necessarily the best method of bringing up a child and are looking to home-schooling as a legal alternative. Cowper denounced the school system of his day as barbaric and developed ideas of education along lines now favoured by many Christian parents. Before going on to comment on Cowper’s views, it may be helpful to consider Cowper’s own education and see what led him to write a long poem on such an unusual theme.

**Christian parents, the Bible and Pilgrim’s Progress**

Cowper was born on 31. November 1731 (Old Style) in Berkhamsted in Hertfordshire. Both his parents belonged to noble families but the poet remembered his parents more for their Christian testimony to him rather than their genetic heritage. He said of them years later:

> My boast is not that I deduce my birth
> From loins enthroned and rulers of the earth;
> But higher far my proud pretensions rise -
> The son of parents pass’d into the skies.  \(^2\)

Cowper was taught to read and write before he started school at the age of four or five. His first ‘book’ was a one-paged sheet of paper with the Lord’s Prayer printed on it, protected from grubby fingers by a thin covering of transparent horn. He then progressed to John Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress*, which was a gift from one of his Norfolk relatives. Of Bunyan’s ‘Pilgrim’ Cowper wrote in his “Review of Schools”:

> Ingenious dreamer, in whose well-told tale
> Sweet fiction and sweet truth alike prevail;
> Whose hum’rous vein, strong sense and simple style,
> May teach the gayest, make the gravest smile;
> Witty and well-employ’d, and, like thy Lord,
> Speaking in parables his slighted word;

Cowper goes on to say how educators of his day sneer at the mention of John Bunyan but he adds,

> Revere the man, whose PILGRIM marks the road,
> And guides the PROGRESS of the soul to God.

**Life at the local Dame School**

Cowper’s first school was a local Dame School to which he was taken each day by the family’s...
gardener. When Cowper was only six years of age, his mother died after a difficult birth. Cowper’s father wished to keep his son under his direct care but the local school was extremely run-down and court cases against the teachers were in process, so Dr Cowper felt compelled to send his son to a boarding school run by a good friend of his at the village of Markyate Street on the Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire border. William Pitman, the Headmaster, was a Classical scholar of note and his pupils were often the sons of Evangelicals. Cowper complained later, however, that he merely learnt “to draw in Latin and Greek trammels” there and rarely had the opportunity to “skip and frisk about”. It was at Markyate Street that Cowper experienced one of the most distressing periods of his life, yet one which drove the boy to prayer and an assurance that God was with him. A boy of fifteen, notorious for his pugnacity rather than his academic ability, bullied Cowper so consistently and mercilessly that he became frightened to look the bully in the face and could only stare at the buckles of his shoes when confronted with him. One day when Cowper was sitting alone in a classroom after the lesson, frightened to go outside because the bully might be waiting for him, a word from the Psalmist came to him, “I will not fear what man can do unto me.” At once the boy’s sorrow left him and he left the classroom skipping and jumping for joy. “It was His gift”, Cowper later wrote in his Memoirs, “in whom I trusted”. Shortly afterwards everything came out into the open and the bully was expelled.

A gentleman boarder at Westminster
A year or so later, Cowper developed serious eye trouble so his father took him from PITMAN’s and boarded him with a married couple, both of whom were skilled oculists. Cowper was very unhappy there and was shocked that “Christianity was neither known nor practised” by the couple. At 10 years of age Cowper was sent as a Gentleman boarder, in accordance, with the family tradition to Westminster. Supervision of the boys was very slack and Cowper had a great deal of leisure time to explore the Thames, read, write poetry and play cricket and football at which he excelled. At the age of thirteen or fourteen Cowper became ill with smallpox but even this, the poet tells us, turned out for the good as after the attack the specks on his eyes disappeared and he could then read for long periods without eyestrain. His favourite author at school was John Milton (1608 - 1674) whose Paradise Lost and Paradise Regained thrilled him so much that, without any effort at all, he could soon quote huge portions of the poem off by heart. Another favourite of Cowper’s was Homer whom he studied in the original from cover to cover with his form-mate Dick (later Sir Richard) Sutton. The only sound teaching Cowper appears to have had at Westminster was the preparation for Confirmation which the Headmaster, Dr. Nicholl insisted on taking charge of himself. As a result of this tuition Cowper started to pray regularly.

More liberty for the scholars than was good for them
Discipline seems to have been quite neglected at times in the school. One day, for instance, wig-wearing Vinnie Bourne, a master at Westminster, had his locks set alight by the young Lord March who then proceeded to box his ears in his dubious efforts to put out the fire. Cowper was especially fond of Bourne, who was a Latin poet of merit, and he was later to translate Bourne’s works giving them a Christian turn. Cowper, however, complained that Bourne was so slovenly and lazy that he tended to make the boys as bad as himself. Chaotic as life at Westminster seems to have been, there were days of glory for some of its pupils. Cowper became House Captain and one of the top three in the Seventh Form. He remembered with joy that his Greek work was passed from form to form by masters for everyone to admire. He also received silver coins from his tutors for his prowess in languages.
On reading what Cowper experienced at Westminster in his prose, it would seem that fun, games and hours of leisure predominated and it is thus amazing how Cowper was able to leave Westminster with a thorough grounding in Greek, Latin, French, Italian, Philosophy and Literature with a smattering of Mathematics, History, Geography and Science. Most of this knowledge was gained by private study and, on leaving Westminster, Cowper took with him a great thirst and capacity for learning which caused him to become one of the best-read men of his day. Cowper, however, always said that he could never express his deepest thoughts in prose but must resort to writing in verse to express the inner feelings of his heart. Thus it is only when Cowper published ‘Tirocinium’, thirty-six years after leaving Westminster, that the poet’s views on the shadow side of public school life became evident.

Cowper’s ‘grown-up’ experience of education

Cowper’s subsequent history: how he became a lawyer and an author of satirical prose; how he was President of the Thursday Club which attracted radicals such as John Wilkes and artists such as Hogarth; how he had a tragic love affair, became mentally ill and was finally converted are facts available in any of the over fifty biographies written about Cowper. What is not always to be found in such works is evidence of Cowper’s continued interest in education. There are references to well over seventy authors on educational themes, character building, the reformation of manners and the Christian way of life in Cowper’s letters. He studied all that the Ancients had to say on education and found Xenaphon particularly helpful.

Cowper read Rousseau, the reformer of education, with a mixture of amusement and disgust, finding Rousseau’s ‘Emil’ nothing but a stuck-up prig. Rousseau’s ignorance of the way children behave caused Cowper to vent his humour and rage at the Frenchman’s naivety in several letters and at least one poem. Rousseau believed, for instance, that it was wrong to tell children fairy tales and stories about talking animals as this was tantamount to deception. Cowper asked what child was ever deceived against the evidence of his senses and responded with his fable entitled Pairing Time Anticipated which starts:

I shall not ask Jean Jaques Rousseau,
If birds confabulate or no;
'Tis clear that they were always able
To hold discourse, at least in fable;
And ev'n the child who knows no better,
Than to interpret by the letter,
A story of a cock and bull,
Must have a most uncommon skull.

Of contemporary educationalists Cowper enjoyed reading Hugh Blair, Professor of Rhetoric and Belles Lettres at the University of Edinburgh and Dr James Beattie, the poet, grammarian and moral philosopher. Cowper could not accept their theory of language as he could not accept their theory of creation and ultimately their theory of man. Though professing Christians, these men had bowed to the rationalism of the day and to the theories of evolution then in vogue. They thus believed that the first men were speechless beings who gradually through arbitrary and conventional means developed a language, starting off with rustic grunts and going on to evolve the complicated languages of modern times. Cowper rejected this theory on several counts. Firstly, it was contrary to Scripture, and though Blair and Beattie argued that God was in the evolutionary process, in reality, God was not needed in their hypothesis. Secondly, their theory was contrary to scientific knowledge as the oldest languages known were highly inflected with not the slightest evidence that they had developed from more simple forms. Thirdly, Cowper argued that Homer was, with the possible exception of Milton, the greatest poet ever, and later poetry was a mere pale reflection of its former glory. In other words, Classical literature has been imitated and simplified since the days of the Ancients, but it has never evolved since then into different, more developed or even better forms. Cowper himself tried to invent new literary forms but failed realising that the ancient Greeks had all the literary genres at their disposal. Cowper’s arguments were not new but were the standard arguments of Puritan writers such as John Preston and John Milton and were also held by many an 18th century Evangelical.

---

3 Cowper obviously read many more books on these subjects but the present author has been able to trace at least seventy titles Cowper read.

4 Emil was presented as a protégé of learning. Before starting on my post-graduate teacher training at Hull, I was asked to be fully conversant with Rousseau’s Emil.

5 See, for instance, Cowper’s letter to Hayley, June 27, 1792.

---

NEW FOCUS PRINTABLE EDITION MARCH 2018

19
Before the soul can know anything about salvation, it must learn deeply and experimentally the nature of sin, and of itself, as stained and polluted by sin. It is proud, and needs to be humbled; careless, and needs to be awakened; alive, and needs to be killed; full, and requires to be emptied; whole, and needs to be wounded; clothed, and requires to be stripped. It is, by nature, self-righteous and self-seeking; is buried deep in worldliness and carnality; is utterly blind and ignorant; is filled with presumption, arrogance, conceit and enmity, and hates all that is heavenly and spiritual.

Sin, in all its various forms, is its natural element. Covetousness, lust, worldly pleasure, desire of the praise of men, an insatiable thirst after self-advancement, a complete self-abandonment to all that can please and gratify every new desire of the heart, an utter contempt and abhorrence of everything that restrains or defeats its mad pursuit of what it loves – these are some of the features of the unregenerate nature of man.

Education, moral restraints, or the force of habit, may restrain the out-breaking of inward corruption, and dam back the mighty stream of indwelling sin, so that it shall not burst all its bounds, and desolate the land; but no moral check can alter human nature. A chained tiger is a tiger still. “The Ethiopian cannot change his skin, nor the leopard his spots”. To make man the direct contrary of what he originally is; to make him love God instead of hating Him; fear, instead of mocking Him; obey, instead of rebelling against Him; and to tremble at His awesome majesty, instead of running upon the thick bosses of His shield-to do this mighty work, and to effect this wonderful change, requires the implantation of a new nature by the immediate hand of God Himself.

Natural light, natural love, natural faith, natural obedience, in a word, all natural religion, is here useless and ineffectual. To turn the stream does not alter the nature of the waters. Let the muddy brook be diverted from its southern course, and made to run north, it is a muddy brook still.

Thus the old nature may be restrained and modified, and directed into new and different channels, but it is old nature still. And this is the employment of hundreds who call themselves ministers of Christ and laborers in His vineyard, to use pick-axe and spade, and cut out various channels for the waters of old nature to run in; and when, by much toil and labour, they have drawn off a few streamlets into their narrow canals, they dignify their success with the names of “conversion”, and “regeneration”, and “a work of grace”.

Thus one cuts out a channel in the Sunday School, another digs a broad canal for the Bible Society, a third opens a new cut for decided piety, and a fourth excavates a wide channel for self-righteousness, under the name of Christian holiness. But after all their pains, and after all their success in leading the streams of nature to flow into these new channels, it is old nature still, as fallen, as ignorant, as blind, as carnal, as dead, as full of enmity against God, and as unable as ever to enter into the kingdom of heaven. To whitewash, to paint, to gild over, to clothe, to put a gloss upon; in a word, to reform the outside of old nature, is the religion of the day.

Hundreds of churches and chapels are built, thousands of sermons are preached and millions of pounds are expended with the sole purpose of hewing out the rough block of nature’ into the shape, limbs and features of a man; and all this labour produces nothing but a statue, a dead image, a lifeless resemblance of vital godliness, which has a mouth, but speaks not; eyes, but sees not; ears, but hears not; hands, but handles not; feet, but walks not; neither speaks through its throat. Churchman and Dissenter, Orthodox and Evangelical, Baptist, Independent and Methodist, all join hand in hand in the good work. “They encourage one another with the words, ‘Be strong!’ The craftsmen rush to make new idols. The carver hurries the goldsmith, and the moulder helps at the anvil. “Good,” they say. ‘It’s coming along fine.’ Carefully they join the parts together, then fasten the thing in place so it won’t fall over.” Isaiah 41:6-7
But reformation is not regeneration, neither is a change of life the same thing as a change of heart. There may be abundance of zeal, devotedness, consistency, studying of the Bible, private and family prayer, hearing of the gospel, religious conversation, attention to the ordinances of the New Testament, and a great show of outward piety and holiness, where there is not a spark of divine life in the soul. Man's religion is to build up the creature in good works, in piety, in hearing the word, in reading religious authors, in activity, in all the busy ferment and excitement of societies and schools. God's religion is to throw the creature down into the dust of self-abasement and self-abhorrence.

Man would teach religion as he teaches arithmetic or mathematics. This rule is to be learned, this sum is to be done, this problem is to be understood, this difficulty is to be overcome, and thus progress is to be made. The fire is to be kindled, the bellows to be blown, the steam to be gotten up, the engine to be set to work, the prescribed task to be done. Religion, according to the received creed, is something which a man must be urged into. He must be made religious somehow or other. He must either be driven or drawn, wheedled or threatened, enticed or whipped into it, by human arguments or human persuasions.

Religion is set before him as a river between his soul and heaven. Into this river he is persuaded, invited, exhorted, entreated to jump. He must leap in, or be pushed in. His feelings are wrought upon, and he takes the prescribed spring. He becomes a professor. He hears, he reads, he prays, he supports the cause; he attends the Sunday School; he models his garb according to the regimentals of the party to which he belongs; he discards shirt collars, combs his hair smooth, and trims off his whiskers; he furnishes his mind with the creed of the sect which he has joined, talks as it talks, believes as it believes, and acts as it acts. And all this is called "conversion" and "decided piety", when all this time there is not an atom of grace, a grain of spiritual faith, or a spark of divine life in the poor wretch's soul.

Now, God's way is very different from all this miserable system, so widely prevalent. He does not build up until He has first pulled down, nor save before He has made the soul to feel itself lost. He does not take the sticks and stubble of old nature to lay a foundation with, nor does He use tar instead of mortar to build up a rotten Babel. Man's way is to put a stick here, and place a stone there; to fill up this corner with a brick and the other corner with a tile; and in this progressive way to build a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven.

God's way is to come down and confound their language, to scatter every stick and every stone to the four winds of heaven, and not to leave one stone upon another that shall not be thrown down. He is a jealous God, and will have no partner in the way of salvation. He will not put the new wine into the old bottle, nor a new patch on the threadbare garment. Joshua's filthy garments (Zechariah 3:4) must be taken away from him before he is clothed with a change of clothing. Thus killing goes before making alive—poverty before riches; beggary and the ash-heap before the inheritance of the throne of glory; the grave of buried hopes and the dust of self-abhorrence before exaltation to a seat among princes. Sowing in tears precedes reaping in joy; ashes go before beauty, mourning before the oil of joy, and the spirit of heaviness before the garment of praise.

Salvation is not an outward thing. It stands not in the letter, but in the spirit; not in a sound creed, but in the enjoyment of it as a balm to a broken heart. Thus, in answering the great question, "What is it which saves a soul?" we must first premise that the very word "save" implies a previous state, for which, and from which, it is a remedy, an escape, a deliverance. That salvation implies previous loss, ruin and misery, and that it is a deliverance from all these, everybody admits. But it is not so readily admitted, or, if acknowledged in words, it is not put forward as a fundamental truth, that it is a felt loss, ruin and misery, from which salvation is an escape.

Joseph Charles Philpot (1802 – 1869) was known as “The Seceder”. He resigned from the Church of England in 1835 and became a Strict & Particular Baptist. While with the Church of England he was a Fellow of Worcester College, Oxford. After becoming a Strict and Particular Baptist he became the editor of the Gospel Standard magazine and served in that capacity for twenty years.
Allan Jellett’s new book *The Kingdom Of God Triumphant* is drawn from a series of sermons preached recently from the Book of Revelation. In it he identifies God’s two witnesses of Revelation 11 as the true church and its gospel preachers. In the face of increasing opposition in these ‘last days’ Pastor Jellett asks what the Lord’s two witnesses are called to do?

They are called to witness, to be ready always to give a reason for the hope that is in them to anyone who asks them (1 Peter 3:15), and the church’s preachers are called to preach the gospel, calling sinners to Christ and warning of the certainty of judgment. They are to strive to grow in grace and the knowledge of Christ, to bear opposition with patience and to increase in their hope for eternal glory in Christ.

**What Must They Testify?**

Revelation 11 verse 4 speaks of the oil of God’s grace and it is of God’s grace they must be witnesses. They declare gospel righteousness, redemption accomplished in Christ’s blood, sinners freely justified and the wrath of judgment turned away. This is the focus of the witnesses’ testimony, the gospel of God’s redeeming love. I challenge every church that ‘has a name that it is alive’ (Revelation 3:1) to declare honestly whether the overwhelming core of their message is the gospel of sovereign grace, and particular redemption by the precious blood of Jesus Christ alone. Without that everything else they might say is mere empty words.

Complementary to the central gospel message, must be warning of impending judgment, as surely as Noah warned his generation. Verse 3 speaks of sackcloth which throughout scripture symbolises repentance. Repentance in hope of escaping judgment. Sackcloth also indicates the need to deliver the testimony without any of the trappings, allurements or gimmicks of the world. How sad to see once faithful churches increasingly adopting worldly techniques and methods to make the message they preach more appealing to the natural flesh of man.

Verse 5 tells of fire proceeding from the witnesses’ mouths in response to worldly attack. This echoes God’s promise through Jeremiah that He would make the prophet’s words as fire in his mouth if delivered faithfully according to the truth of God (Jeremiah 5:14). The ‘fire’ is judgment declared as the certain end for rejecting the gospel. The two witnesses, Christ’s church and his anointed preachers, proclaim these things in the face of opposition, scorn, and unbelief using only spiritual weapons (2 Corinthians 10:4), but these are ‘mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds’. With their words they will ‘kill’ (v. 5), they will silence the power of those who oppose the message, and they will bring down God’s judgments on this kingdom of Satan as did Noah, Moses, Elijah, Zerubbabel and Joshua the priest.

**What To Expect**

In the light of these things, having a measure of understanding of what God has revealed through John concerning His true church and wider Christendom in these days, what can we expect to happen next?

Above all else we can be confident that God will keep His people; Christ prayed for this and it will surely be granted (John 17:11, 15). Living in the world but not of the world, Christ’s church will be kept in wilderness separation from the principles of the world and will be fed by God (Revelation 12:6) until they are all taken to glory (Revelation 11:12). But that will not happen before their testimony is to all intents and purposes silenced (v. 7).

The beast of verse 7 is Satan’s Antichrist which we shall see in greater clarity in later chapters. For now suffice it to say that Antichrist is manifested in all false religion and all self-righteous attempts to reach heaven without the Christ of God. This beast ascends from the bottomless pit (v. 7), makes war on God’s two witnesses, overcomes them and kills them. The witnesses’ dead bodies lie unburied in the street of the world’s ‘city’, the metropolis of peoples that reject the true God. Symbolically, and spiritually, this city is Sodom, it is Egypt, it is even Jerusalem where our Lord was crucified, it is the God-rejecting, gospel-rejecting, world we see all around us today. And seeing the witnesses’ bodies lying openly in the street, the
world’s people refuse to let them be buried out of sight. They go so far (v. 10) as celebrating the death of the witnesses because the message of grace and warning that so tormented them has been silenced, seemingly forever. Their sin can progress without restraint, or so they think.

We are speaking of a time when the true church and its ministers are effectively silenced, disrupted and made to be non-functioning as living, visible, churches bearing God’s testimony. It is my conviction that in the UK today the church which stands solidly for the true gospel is as good as ‘lying dead in the street’. Even 30 years ago, you could find churches ministering the gospel of free sovereign grace widely distributed. Today you struggle to find a handful remaining true. Even where the witness is upheld, it is often the case that the fellowships concerned are unable to function as a living church with building, structure, a good number of members and a visible life as a church. That is the case with our own gathering. Here in the UK we meet in a home on Sunday mornings only, with barely ten adults meeting together. To the world and false religion we are ‘lying dead in the street’. Even when we had a regular meeting place, Satan’s beast contrived to make it practically impossible for us to hold public meetings there throughout the 9-month rugby football season! Even in the USA where there is a thriving association of independent free grace churches and pastors, the numbers involved are miniscule compared to the population of the country and the populous swathes of Arminian, Catholic, Episcopal, Reformed and Presbyterian churches claiming to represent modern ‘Christianity’. I believe we are living in the days described here in Revelation 11:7-10.

Exciting Days
Nevertheless, these are exciting days! The signs of Christ’s return are increasing. Who would have thought 30 years ago that Revelation 11:7-10 would be happening as I have described here? What God signified through John over 1,900 years ago is unfolding unmistakeably as prophesied then. Not only that, the death of the witnesses is only as it appears to the world and false religion. The true church of Christ will never really die. The gates of hell shall not prevail against it! Look at verse 11; after just 3½ days lying apparently dead the witnesses stand up and great fear falls on all.

While the world and false religion is rejoicing over the demise of what it recognises as functioning witnesses for God, the gospel has never been more clearly preached than it is in these days. I consider it remarkable that coincident with the demise of what was the visible witness of God in the world, let us call it faithful evangelical churches preaching sovereign grace in most towns throughout the country, the internet has blossomed. Especially in the last 15 years there has been a quite unexpected facility and ability for ‘scattered sheep’ to join others for worship and to hear the gospel faithfully and powerfully preached. Our own little group of 10 or so is now joined by possibly hundreds of others around the world using the internet. As verse 11 says, there is cause for the world and false religion to fear. You see, the witnesses are not dead; they are brimming with the life of Christ and shortly they shall hear that blessed voice of verse 12 declare, “Come up hither!”. The day of the Lord is surely close (1 Thessalonians 5:2). Are you living on the ‘tiptoe of faith’ looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of the Great God our Saviour, Jesus Christ?
We are delighted to announce that the 2018 New Focus Conference will again be hosted by Merton Evangelical (Baptist) Church in south London beginning Saturday morning 5th May, 2018 and running through Saturday evening and finishing with a service on Sunday morning 6th May. Our friends from Christian Bookshop Ossett will provide a bookstall.

Harry Qazi will preach on Saturday morning, Don Fortner and Allan Jellett will both preach on Saturday afternoon and Peter Meney will minister on Saturday evening. On Sunday morning John Graham and Don Fortner will both minister. The services will include a communion service and an ordination service. A full schedule with times is available on the New Focus website.

Those wishing to travel to the event and requiring accommodation should note hotels in the area get booked up very quickly. The church building is less than ¼ mile from South Wimbledon tube station on the Northern Line for those within commuting distance. Car parking is not at all easy. Those seeking hotel accommodation should look for the London district SW19. The church’s postcode is SW19 2LG and there is Premier Inn, Holiday Inn Express, the Antoinette and many other venues within a mile or two’s distance.

Full details are available at www.go-newfocus.co.uk with car, tube, train and parking suggestions as well as numerous hotel options for which we thank Pastor Harry Qazi.

Further information is available from:

Allan Jellet
07403 375393
allan.jellett@me.com
www.knebworthgracechurch.com

Harry Qazi
07985 414520
mecbaptist@yahoo.co.uk
www.mertonevangelicalchurch.wordpress.com

Peter Meney
peter@go-newfocus.co.uk
www.go-newfocus.co.uk

As always, to assist with catering, we shall be grateful to hear from those planning to attend. The conference is free to attend. Collections will be uplifted to help cover the costs.

We encourage all who can join us to do so. We believe in the importance of faithful men preaching the gospel of free sovereign grace and value the blessings granted by God the Holy Spirit in the mutual fellowship of the Lord’s people gathered to worship their Lord and Saviour.